

Congressmen Mark Kirk And Mike Quigley Seek Probe Of Project Shield

WASHINGTON (CBS) □ Two Chicago area Congressmen have asked the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Inspector General to investigate reports that Cook County officials mismanaged taxpayer funds in launching a police emergency surveillance system.

Project Shield is a federally funded program intended to link video surveillance in suburban Cook County to a central command center. But U.S. Reps. Mike Quigley (D-Ill.) and Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) say it is "36 percent over budget, three years late and subject to widespread waste, fraud and abuse."

[Last year, police sources told CBS 2 Investigator Dave Savini taxpayers were ripped off, and the cameras didn't work.](#)

CBS 2 Investigators sifted last year through government contracts and confidential emails revealing how Project Shield's pot of money was dished out. The trail led to bankrupt companies, phony addresses and falsified documents -- not the words you want to hear when talking about terrorism and your tax dollars.

Federal tax dollars paid for the \$40 million system to be installed in squad cars and on towers throughout Cook County. But suburban police officials complained they couldn't get it to work on a daily basis. It got so bad that several police departments ripped the gear out of their squad cars, including in Wilmette, River Forest and Country Club Hills.

The 2 Investigators last year also uncovered confidential records raising questions about how tax dollars were used. A confidential e-mail between contractors in 2005 indicated they needed to find \$870,000 worth of work for certain minority- and women-owned businesses even though the contractors had "great difficulty finding work for them to do." It added: "We will make it happen."

Mentioned in the email was SOS Quality Systems run by Sheketta Cox. She confirmed her ties to Cook County Board President Stroger -- providing a computer and doing consulting for him when he was her 8th Ward alderman.

Cox told CBS 2 last year that her since-closed company was rushed into the project because of her minority status. She said a Project Shield subcontractor paid her and she turned around and put that same company's employees on her payroll.

One of those employees was given a 1099 tax record listing a church as his employer for the homeland security project. Church officials said they never heard of Project Shield and wonder

how an 8th ward businesswoman obtained their federal employer identification number.

Since then, the Chicago Sun-Times reported this week that Cook County fired its primary contractor after already spending \$26 million on the project.

Quigley and Kirk say these revelations warrant action.

"The arrest and impeachment of former Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich highlights the level of public corruption in Illinois, and we believe your office should conduct a complete investigation of these reports to ensure that the interests of the taxpayer are protected," Kirk and Quigley wrote in their letter to Homeland Security Department Inspector General Richard L. Skinner.